

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

BETTER THAN THE ELIXIR.

LIVING MATTER. ITS CYCLE OF GROWTH AND DECLINE IN ANIMAL ORGANISMS. By C. A. Stephens. 12mo, pp. 107. The Laboratory Co.: Norway Lake, Maine.

It is stated in a prefatory note that "this small volume is a 'resume' of an extended investigation into the causes of old age and organic death. It is furthermore designed as an introduction to a number of handbooks treating of the revitalization of the human organism." The ultimate contention of the author is that the life of man may, by careful research and the proper utilization of physiological laws and discoveries, be prolonged almost indefinitely. Climacteric as the proposition appears when thus boldly stated, it would be unfair to the ingenuity and learning of the author to let it be supposed that he proceeds after the fashion of an empiric. On the contrary, his argument throughout is strictly in keeping with the most advanced physiology, histology and chemical analysis, and it may be freely admitted that he succeeds in making out so plausible a case as cannot but hold the interest and fascinate the imagination of his most sceptical readers. The book itself is so closely compacted that any attempt to represent its contents in outline with any approach to faithfulness must be useless; but it may be worth while to indicate a few salient features of the argument, if only to show that it is well worth reading, whatever its scientific value may be.

The unity of living matter is the author's primary position, and here he is unquestionably on solid ground. In adopting, however, the theory of germination to account for the passing over of characteristic traits, etc., he occupies a dubious attitude. It is scarcely too much to say that this theory has been rejected by the greatest embryologists and evolutionists, mainly as presenting so many difficulties and complications that its acceptance demands too many questionable assumptions. The theory of germination, however, is not indispensable to Mr. Stephens's prime contention, which is that biogen (or living matter) is a constant—that is to say, that under all circumstances and conditions its qualities and potentialities continue the same. The illustrations in support of this are ingenious and to the point. The corollaries are important. Biogen being shown to be a constant, it would follow, as Mr. Stephens maintains, that old age and death do not result from any loss of virtue in living matter. But if this is the case, another consequence ensues, namely, that the decline of life is caused by purely physical and physiological agencies, which may be—when in some instances already are—controllable and capable of modification, relief or removal.

A long quotation will, perhaps, illustrate the argument: "The popular hypothesis of life, death and 'old age,' rests on the assumption that life is qualitatively diminished in aging organisms; or, in other words, that vitality, as a physical process, slackens from variability of its originating force, and hence that death comes to a person from this decline of the initial vital power in the organism. But if our argument be logical and our conclusion correct, the truth is that life is never qualitatively, but only quantitatively, diminished; or, in other words, that vitality as a physical process never slackens from any variability of its originating force, that force being the universal substance of matter, and as constant as gravitation and the weight of the earth; and hence that death comes to a person, not from a decline of this initial power itself, but from those extrinsic obstacles which beset from the material environment and from imperfect modes of living." Old age, according to this theory, is often "largely a slow starvation of the living matter in the organism." The neumatization of "formed matter" so lingers in the biogen that it can no longer grow. The tissues, not acting vigorously, retain waste matters and so block up the areas in which the living matter seeks to expand and renew itself. If these obstacles could be removed, there is no reason why the biogen should not maintain the life of the organism indefinitely; and Mr. Stephens holds that it is within the scope of science to apply this remedy. Certainly all who have not taken the advice of Schopenhauer and renounced the "will to live" must hope that Mr. Stephens will be able to solve the knotty problems he has attacked with so much courage and acumen.

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